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MEMOIR OF JOHN HOWARD REDFIELD.

BY THOMAS MEEHAN.

The task assigned to me by the Academy of preparing a suitable memoir of our late fellow-member, John Howard Redfield, is not an easy one. To make famous one who sought not fame; and to tell to the world of science the story of the life of one whose modesty and self-abnegation scarcely allowed him to appreciate the value of his own work, is surely a difficult undertaking. It has been my fortune to have an acquaintance with mankind to an extent enjoyed by few; with men and women famous in many walks of life; but I have rarely known one who worked with such an earnest purpose to be useful, and who was at the same time so indifferent as to whether the world knew of it or not, or whether he received credit for the work which he had done. Associated with him as I have been in the botanical work of the Academy since the early sixties, and I may say closely connected with him in that work for the past twenty years, I am amazed, now that he is gone, when I think of how little I know of the man beyond his own beloved personality in connection with that work. Once only did he stop to tell me of his early life-struggle in the pursuit of knowledge. Referring to an early incident in my own life occasioned by a little fern we were examining, it moved him to say how similar were our experiences. Though but four years of age he could remember going with his father to visit his mother's grave, and how much he became interested in the flowers which grew there; of his being told that one was the "yarrow," and of his remembering the plant by this name forever after; how his father, like himself, had no early advantages but with an insatiable curiosity and such scientific books as chance threw in his way, was continually talking to him, as he grew in years, of the cause and effect of natural phenomena as he understood them; how his father and he took a wagon ride to his wife's relations through a storm-torn forest; while the son was looking for flowers, minerals, shells and anything that was curious, the father was noting the different directions in which the trees had been prostrated, and was thus led ultimately to discover the rotary motion of storms and tornadoes; how the simplest elements of knowledge only were taught in the district school by peripatetic teachers who boarded around, and taught during the terms, Lindley's English Reader, Milton's Paradise Lost, the Bible and Cook's Voyages being nearly all the books within reach. Among all these varied teachers he remembered two women, to whom he was especially indebted for his love of flowers and nature. They fixed in him his earlier tendencies and he was emphatic in his belief that for boys under ten years of age good women, all other things being equal, rather than men, make the best teachers. His father brought him from New York a Latin grammar and reader, and he tried in a measure to teach himself. He was now at an age—ten years—to appreciate the value of knowledge, and would recite his lesson to the minister of their church. A literary society was founded in the vicinity, encouraged mainly by his father, and it was, he thought, this little institution which made a man of him, though there were not over three hundred volumes in the library. One of these books was Thornton's Grammar of Botany. He felt himself something of a botanist from that time. His father subsequently moved to New York. Here a school on the Lancasterian system was established, a system in which the advanced boys, as monitors, aided in teaching the classes; but instead of the mere elementary studies in the general Lancasterian system, a higher school was established in which mathematics, drawing, bookkeeping, the ancient and modern languages, and something of a business collegiate course was attempted. His father having met with financial reverses, the boy had to leave school when fourteen years of age and help to support himself by entering as a clerk in a dry goods store, his work being to clean, dust and deliver parcels. Thus he passed three years, keeping up, however, his early habit of self-culture in all his spare time. The story was so interesting that I made a note of it, and this is all our good friend ever said to me of himself.

I was elected a member of the Academy in 1860, and at once applied myself to assist Mr. Elias Durand, who alone seemed interested in the herbarium at that time. Mr. Redfield, a few years later, though actively engaged in business, made a practice of dropping in for a short time at noon, daily, to give encouragement by his presence at least. This was my first acquaintance with him.

Mr. Durand died soon after. The collection was in a deplorable condition. Mr. Durand had been very generous of his time and abilities, but all he could do was in connection with the North American herbarium. The building was on the line of a dusty street, and the dust-covered packages of genera or natural orders were quite repellant. Mr. Redfield's cheering calls were bright spots in my lonely task. I tried, however, to interest some of my correspondents in behalf of the herbarium. Dr. Gray's reply was suggestive. "What is the use of throwing valuable material into a dust bin?" I was pondering over the note when Mr. Redfield made his daily call. "Never mind that," said he, in his cheery manner, "I shall have more time soon, and the new building is to go up near my residence. We will show them what sort of a 'dust bin' we shall have after a while." From this time he began active work on the herbarium, looking at first into the few collections, and commenced the great task he imposed on himself, resulting in giving us a herbarium of which botanical science everywhere is proud. His intelligent earnestness made friends for the Academy everywhere, and it is pleasant to note that among all these friends no one was more liberal or generous than the author of the "dust bin" note. With the exception of the three summer months when he took a vacation to northern sea shores, every day was given to herbarium work, while many of his evenings were devoted to correspondence with botanical friends all over the world. At his death he had catalogued and indexed so that any specimen can be examined in a few seconds, the whole collection numbering some thirty-five thousand species of flowering plants and ferns. He had, with the aid of an assistant, verified and fastened one-half of the specimens.

The Academy is indebted to John H. Redfield not only for his great labors in behalf of the herbarium, but for the influence of his personal character. His amiable qualities endeared him to every one with whom he came in contact; his generous helpfulness, especially to younger botanists, carried gratitude to many distant regions; eminent men from all parts of the world honored him and gave him pleasure by calling on him and enjoying his hospitality when passing through the city. The Academy profited by the many gifts of plants made as a tribute to his worth. It is probable no one ever heard Mr. Redfield make an ill-natured remark of another even under temptation. Always full of good humor, he would even in a controversy incline by some pleasant remark to allow the verdict to go against himself. In this connection he was fond of repeating an anecdote. A Scotchman returning to his native village inquired of the sexton the state of affairs. The sexton sadly reported the decadence of religion. In his opinion the only adherents of the true faith were himself and the dominie, and sometimes he had "doots" about the minister himself. He would suggest that perhaps he might be as critical of the views of his friends as Sandy was. Loving appropriate stories to illustrate his points, he enjoyed them when used by others. He often quoted from Dr. Gray, who, like himself, was overflowing with good nature. Mr. Redfield had asked him to let him have some duplicates if there were any. It happened that there was but a single set, and no duplicates. Dr. Gray's pleasant response was: "As the boy said when the other hoped for a bite of the apple, and modestly asked for the core, 'Billy, there ain't goin' to be no core in this apple.'' Such humorous stories usually came in when it was evident further discussion was hopeless of results.

There were, however, a few topics on which his exceptional good nature would admit of no compromise, even in the way of a pleasant remark of no great consequence either way. One of these was the well-meaning effort of some botanists to strictly enforce the rule of priority in botanical nomenclature. To him, Conservator of a great herbarium, the effort admitted of no joke. The older names to replace those long adopted were so numerous, that the revolution meant to him the comparative uselessness of his life-long work. There must be new numbers, new lists, new names on the sheets, new alphabetical indexes. He could not begin that great work of change at his time of life, nor could he see anyone in prospect who would. He vigorously contended that there must be something wrong in an effort that would render such life-work as his comparatively useless. Commendations for the stand he had taken in this matter were among the greatest pleasures of his latter days.

Since his active connection with the Academy, he seems not to have taken many long botanical excursions. One, however, the pleasure of which he loved to recall, was made in the summer of 1876, in company with Mr. W. M. Canby, Dr. Asa Gray, Dr. Engelmann and Prof. C. S. Sargent, through the mountains of North Carolina, the result of which considerably enriched the herbarium of the Academy. In 1879 he made another journey to North Carolina with Dr. Gray to see where *Shortia* grew. One may see from the scrupulous care with which every fact of importance is noted on the labels attached to the plants collected on these journeys how well trained to conscientious accuracy his mind had been. His work for the day would be finished and cleared up as if he never expected to resume it again ; and when he undertook a task his mind dwelt on it until the end had been reached. Happening, while penning these lines, to open a volume on my table treating of the Celastraceæ, I find a letter between the pages which well illustrates this finished character. We had together been working up an unnamed collection from Tabasco in Mexico. Leaving in the afternoon, I expected to be again in the herbarium the next or at most the day after. But he could not wait, and the letter came the next morning: "Phila., March 3rd, 1893. My Dear Meehan : I enclose you two or three softened flowers of our last *adversarium* for you to examine. As *I* see them, they have five rounded imbricate sepals, five strongly reflexed petals, five stamens *alternate with the petals,* filaments conical, no style, but stigma sessile on the ovary. The ovary is too small for my poor eyes to dissect.

Try every way I can, I am driven back to Celastrinæ, and I have a suspicion that our plant *may* be *Zinowiewia integerrima* Turcz. B. & H. I, 364. B. & H. description says "*stylus brevis,*" but the original description says "stigma sessile on the ovary." B, & H. say "folia opposita," but if I recollect right, the original description says "leaves alternate." But there are some difficulties about this view. Yours, J. H. R."

On some other occasion, when we would feel the "nut too hard to crack," I would hardly be home before there would be a brief note, "Eureka!" and the name following as he had determined it. It must be to this habit of beginning and finishing at once if possible, that we must ascribe the wonderful amount of work accomplished. He commenced the work of putting the herbarium in order in 1870. In addition to the preparation for fastening down the specimens and the accompanying label, on which work he was engaged at the time of his death, he had previously arranged in genus-covers the whole collection, writing on each the genus and the numbers to correspond with Bentham and Hooker's work, and made a corresponding index of classes and orders, so that any genus could be found in a few seconds. All the species had been alphabetically arranged in the genus covers, and an alphabetical list of the named species pasted inside. Anyone can see at a glance whether the plant he is looking for is in the collection. Besides this, in the section of ferns, the whole collection is written up in a handsome bound volume, with an index that not only enables one to find at once the plant desired but also its geographical range and many other facts of importance to the student of pteridology. By reason of this careful cataloguing he was able to tell exactly the number of species the herbarium contained, information few care-takers of herbariums can give. A careful record was kept of every donation, and the donors' names, like the names of the plants themselves, could soon be given to any inquirer. And yet he never seemed unduly hurried. In addition to this he had formed a great herbarium of his own, and had made extensive collections in other fields of natural history. Moreover, he maintained to the last an interest in many other branches of science and in the many fields of general intelligence that commanded the attention of public spirited citizens. He was fond of looking up facts in the lives of useful men, placing them on record, and getting in shape for reference any good work that they had done. He prepared for his family a full genealogy of their ancestry. Another valuable task that he accomplished was the collection and arranging of the botanical correspondence of Zaccheus Collins, which precious volume is kept for safety in the fireproof of the Academy. The work is invaluable for the light it sheds on the lives and labors of our early botanists. When Michaux's Journal was discovered among the archives of the American Philosophical Society and Prof. Sargent decided to translate it from French to English, and have copies printed, he aided the Professor in overseeing its issue from the press. He was always ready for every such call.

It seems but yesterday that I heard his last remark to me: "I must lay these aside now, as I will attend the Forestry Convention at 4 o'clock," and even the last letter he wrote to me on his death bed was full of his work. "I felt chillier than I ought to be when I was in the herbarium room on Friday, and went home. I am resting in bed now, and the Botanical Section meeting to-night must take care of itself." To many who have since paused to reflect on the wonderful amount of work accomplished, his methodical and systematic habits furnish the only explanation. Frequently he has been approached by friends to allow the use of his name for the higher honors of the Academy. This he always declined. He could never be induced, even in the Botanical Section, to accept any higher position than Conservator of the herbarium. He served many years as Councillor, in which position his business training rendered eminent service, and he succeeded Dr. Joseph Leidy as Chairman of the Publication Committee of the Academy.

Aside from his services to science in the Academy, the outer scientific world is largely his debtor. When the American Society of Geologists became the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the father, W. C. Redfield, suggested the change and was the first President of the new body, the son being a member. The Lyceum of Natural History of New York had the benefit of his able services before his removal to Philadelphia, in 1861, to be associated in the business of Asa Whitney & Sons —the senior member of the firm being his father-in-law. At the request of his family he penned for them an account of his early history and of his connection with the New York Lyceum, which I have been kindly permitted to examine, and from which I gather the following facts. In the preface to this little family task he concludes: "Moreover ought I not to leave some expression of gratitude to my Heavenly Father for a life which has been so full of mercies, which has flowed so evenly and so smoothly, disturbed by few storms and tempests, and of which the few sharp afflictions have been tempered with mercies, calling for thanksgiving."

He traces the American family to Wm. Redfin, of English birth, who settled near Cambridge, Mass., in 1639, and who subsequently moved to New London, Connecticut. The form Redfield was assumed before 1662. His only son, James Redfield, was a tanner. His son, Theophilus Redfield, married a descendent of John Alden, of Mayflower celebrity. Peleg, the grandson of Theophilus, the grandfather of John Howard Redfield, was born at Middletown, Connecticut, January 22, 1762. He entered a privateer during the war of Independence, was captured by a British frigate, but escaped; he died in 1802. Wm. C. Redfield was Peleg's eldest son. He was born at South Farms, Connecticut, March, 26, 1789. He was apprenticed to a saddler, joined a village debating society, and, under the inspiration of his mother, spent all his spare time in self-instruction.

J. H. Redfield was born at Middletown, Conn., July 10, 1815. His mother died when he was but four years old. His father at this time had a saddler's shop and country store. His early education has been already told. In this account Mr. Redfield notes that every country store sold liquor, but in 1830 his father refused, as a matter of conscience, to sell any more. About 1825 his father becoming interested in steam barge traffic on the Hudson, spent most of his time in New York, and in 1827 took his family there. John was sent to a Lancasterian school. It furnished good, although cheap, education—($51.50 a year). The principal teacher, Rev. Samuel U. Barnes, originally a Baptist clergyman, gave natural history lessons on the blackboard. He gave J. H. Redfield and six other boys extra lessons in mineralogy, taking them on excursions on Saturdays. Barnes was one of the founders of the New York Lyceum. He used to join in the sports of the boys as well as their studies, and for the first time in his life young Redfield loved school.

The father took every means to advance the son's education as opportunity afforded. Though personal assiduity did much, he owed much to the teachers employed by his father for him. He had this help in the several languages he acquired, the Italian, which he mastered late in life, being the only one he learned wholly by himself. In 1853 he left school finally and became a clerk in the "Swift Sure Line" of steamboats. His father died in 1858, but he continued in the office three years longer, till removing to Philadelphia.

The New York Lyceum was organized April 24, 1817, and became the New York Academy of Sciences in 1876. As a new member of the Lyceum young Redfield thought a tyro had made a mistake in venturing among great men, but he found them all so child-like and genial that his agitation was soon dispelled. Dr. Asa Gray, the librarian, was especially cordial. Young Redfield had his first scientific appointment as one of a committee to rent a room. It was thought wonderful that twenty-four members assembled to receive the committee's report. His father gave occasional addresses on meteorology and geology. Dr. John C. Jay first made conchology interesting in the Lyceum and Redfield became charmed with that study. His father was second Vice-President of the Lyceum of Natural History from 1847 to 1851, and first Vice-President from 1852 to 1863, and the son was Corresponding Secretary from 1859 to 1860 and previously, from 1857 to 1858, Recording Secretary. He notes Dr. Asa Gray, at that time 26 years old, as coming into the Lyceum about 1853. Dr. Torrey was an early friend of W. C. Redfield, so the son knew him before he joined the Lyceum. Though botany was the son's early love, threatened impairment of eye-sight diverted him to conchology. He soon became again warmly interested in botany, rising for collecting excursions at four in the morning.

Passing now to his labors with us, it may be noted that he rarely missed a meeting of the Academy, and was one of the most regular in throwing into the general fund such knowledge as he possessed on the subjects discussed. He may be regarded as the chief founder of the Botanical Section, and he gave freely of his knowledge in most of the discussions before the Section. Reports of many of his verbal communications have been published in the Proceedings of the Academy.

His first contribution to scientific literature was in 1860, when he described a new shell—a species of *Marginella*. He furnished the notes on the genus *Marginella* as described in Reave's Conchologia Iconica and in Tryon's American Journal of Conchology in 1869 and 1870. His nine earlier papers in the Annals of the New York Lyceum, relate wholly to conchological subjects. The "Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club" contains a number of articles by him on botanical topics, one of which, "The Geographical Distribution of the Ferns of North America," in the volume for 1875, is of standard value, as is also the paper on "Insular Flora" in the volume for 1886. His greatest and last contribution is the "Preliminary Catalogue of the Plants growing on Mt. Desert and adjacent islands," by Edward L. Rand and John H. Redfield, which was issued in 1894. The work, though with characteristic modesty styled a "preliminary catalogue," ranks among the best of local floras, and will long aid in keeping the name of the associate author fresh in the memory of working botanists. Tributes to his memory from many correspondents all speak of the unselfish goodness of the man. Our highly venerated colleague, Dr. Ruschenberger, who has also recently passed away from us, in a letter written on March 18, but a short time before his own death, remarked on the peculiar modesty of Mr. Redfield: "He never, within my hearing, made his own acts a subject of conversation or reference." Mr. E. L. Rand, his colleague in the preparation of the "Preliminary Catalogue," sums up briefly what so many have expressed more in detail: "Circumstances threw us into the most intimate correspondence and association during the last seven or eight years and made me familiar with his beautiful character. He was always high-principled, simple-hearted, charitable, kind and helpful, an affectionate friend, a wise counsellor, an upright judge. I can hardly realize that he is really gone from this earth, and that I am left alone in the work that we pursued so long together."

February the 27th, 1895, the day on which he passed away, will long be remembered in the annals of the Academy as the anniversary of the loss of one of its most valuable and devoted associates.